The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Vesco Cozied Up to Donald Nixon

By Jack Anderson

The international financial finagler, Robert Vesco, believes that the way to a politician's heart is through his pocketbook. In both the U.S. and Costa Rica, he has tried to buy his way into the good graces of Presidents Nixon and Figueres themselves.

The approach was through their families. In the U.S., Vesco cozied up to the President's wheeling-dealing brother, Donald Nixon, whose son has been sharing the good life with the financier as his personal aide. We have been reporting on the strange relationship between Vesco and the Nixons since February 16, 1972.

To gather the facts and gain access to the President's brother, my associate George Clifford posed as a businessman. He found Donald Nixon an irrepressible operator who talked incessantly about business deals and winked knowingly to emphasize the significance of what he was saying.

A typical remark: "Don't overlook the possibility of trade with China. And with Russia," he said, winking. "There is an opportunity there. Someone has to do business with them."

Nixon also confided that John Ehrlichman, the deposed White House aide, talked to Donald, Jr., about his job with Vesco. Apparently the boy was something of a disappointment to the family. He had been in the mountains, said the father, associating with hippies.

"That dumb b———," Nixon said of his son. "John Ehrlichman talked to him for a couple of hours and told him he had to behave himself over there (with Vesco). You know, he told him he was the President's nephew and couldn't do anything to embarrass the President."

Aiding Figueres

Just as Vesco sought out Donald Nixon, the financier also zeroed in on President Jose Figueres' family, including his son Marti. A secret CIA report, made available to us, quotes the Figueres' nephew, Fernando Figueres, as saying the family business enterprises were "doing poorly."

"Fernano Figueres, who manages some of the president's businesses, said that he personally has asked to be allowed to resign because of these financial difficulties," notes the CIA. "He commented that all the members of the president's family are deeply concerned with family financial matters and the fact that the president does not seem to be able to administer his business enterprises profitably."

Still another source close to the respected Costa Rican president quoted him as saying "that his financial situation was very bad. (The source) indicated that Figueres seemed obsessed with his financial problems."

The situation was made to order for Vesco, who has been accused by the Securities and Exchange Commission of looting $224 million from his foreign-based investment complex and moving the money to Costa Rica and the Bahamas.

The finagler ingratiated himself with Figueres by helping to solve some of his financial problems. The grateful Figueres wrote to President Nixon last July about the SEC investigation of Vesco, expressing concern that it might jeopardize Costa Rica's development.

Now that Vesco is under indictment in the U.S., it has been hinted he may give up his U.S. citizenship and make Costa Rica his new home. Figueres has made it clear this would be fine with him. The CIA has made it clear this would also be fine for him.